

**ResCare Written Testimony H-7171, Article 15, Sec 7 & 8 - Governor's Budget-
Definition of Dependent Child & Earned income for Newly Employed Adults on RI Works**

My name is Michelle Mooney and I am a Case Manager with ResCare Workforce Solutions – we are a vendor of the RI Works program and we assist participants in achieving sustainable employment and economic self-sufficiency.

Since beginning our services in June of 2018, we have helped over 445 RI Works participants enter gainful employment through our holistic approach to work readiness including career pathway and vocational services exploration. Our RI Works participants are now working for prominent Rhode Island employers including Lifespan, American Airlines, Fed Ex, Bank of America, First Student, The US Census, Amica, AAA, Roger Williams University, CVS, Miriam Hospital, Home Care Advantage and the City of Providence.

We have case managers all throughout the state of Rhode Island including Providence, Woonsocket, Newport, Tiverton and West Warwick. Personally, I manage a case load in both Providence and West Warwick but can tell you that each of these locations have their own advantages as well as their own needs and diverse barriers – but most importantly they have one important theme in common: Individuals who come through our program want to be successful and independent. These individuals are tremendously committed to putting in the hard work it takes to be ready for successful and sustainable job placements despite their many social, financial, and educational barriers. They want opportunities to be able to provide and create long lasting stability for their family.

This is why I am in support of H-7171, Article 15, Section 7 & 8 – Definition of Dependent Child & The Earned Income Exclusion for Newly Employed Adults. I believe that giving RI Works participants an opportunity to stay on RI Works, to avoid disruption of benefits – we allow them the ever-important time to create stability in their lives. All too often, participants come to me and this is their story: back rent is owed because the benefit is too low for them to pay the full amount, they are behind on utilities, cannot pay car insurance and have used up what little monies they had in their savings.

I'd like to tell you about a few of our customers. First, I would like to tell you about Tiffany. Tiffany came to us and was willing to look at a wide variety of employment – she was eager for employment. She lacked a High School Diploma or GED, so this limited what she would be able to find and in what industries. However, she was quickly offered a position working for Dunkin's for \$11/hour and she was excited about this. After starting work though, she lost her cash assistance, her SNAP was impacted, and she no longer had transportation assistance - all within 30 days of starting work. She was already behind on rent and utilities and this just made it harder to get caught up and to develop a safety net. Thankfully, we were able to support Tiffany and worked with her to develop a very tight budget – but she was living paycheck to paycheck for the first few months and struggling to maintain employment.

The second client I would like to tell you about is Katherine – Katherine is a client in West Warwick. She has only been working with me for less than a month and she has already told me that she owes \$950 in back rent with an ever-growing bill as she continues to pay what she can. Additionally, she owes \$600 in utilities and cannot keep her phone on. Even once she is employed, it will take time to stabilize financial debt which means that she is at risk with 2 kids. I know that she is highly employable and that she will gain employment, but I also recognize that the immediate loss of benefits such as transportation, food assistance coupled with her current debt will make it extremely challenging to keep housing, feed her children, get to work – and maintain employment.

The final client I would like to tell you about is Marlina. She entered employment at CVS corporate headquarters. Upon gaining employment, she was immediately terminated from benefits. Even before getting her first pay check she had to pay for bus passes for her and her children, pay for food for her family, and pay an increased copay for childcare. She had a choice between these essential needs and paying the rent. Within a month of starting her job she was close to being homeless and on the verge of losing the job she worked so hard to achieve.

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But I know that we can change these narratives. By allowing families the option to remain on RI Works Benefits for up to an additional 6 months after employment, we can give them time and the assistance they need to stay employed – they will not have to worry about housing, utilities, transportation or food and can simply focus on work and building a career and gaining stability during this crucial transition back to employment.

Additionally, by changing the editing the definition of a dependent child, we are allowing 18-year olds, who are still in school or working on a GED program, to remain eligible for RI Works. Children who are still in high school, are dependent on their parent. When we rip away this benefit when they are 18, we are essentially telling them that we no longer care about the stability of your household and more importantly, no longer care if you complete high school. It is crucial that we make pathways for students to get their high school diploma or GED by supporting them or we risk them dropping out, facing homelessness and ultimately coming to the state for assistance themselves.

Though not mentioned, I encourage you to support an increase to the clothing allowance for RI Works families as well as a benefit increase. Families currently receive a onetime \$30 payment for clothing for their students. Thirty dollars does not go very far anymore – it is barely enough to buy one outfit if you are lucky. I support raising this allowance to \$100.

The increase in benefit amount is crucial for families. The benefit has not been raised in thirty years. **Thirty years.** As a result, families are expected to support themselves on \$6/day/person. Do you know what you can buy for \$6/day? Can you pay your bills with \$6/day? Could you afford transportation? Childcare? Food for your household? Rent or your mortgage? The answer is no, you cannot. We are leaving families vulnerable, at risk for eviction and homelessness and in deep poverty. **The State of Rhode Island can do better.**

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Michelle Mooney